W. J. Locke Thrust at the Nightingale and Slew Kate Carew's Pet Illusion

The Writer of the "Beloved Vagabond," "Marcus Ordeyne," etc., Was Literally Run to Earth in His Beauti.ul Garden an our's Ride from London, and Did the Honors of the Place Hosp tably.

By Kate Carew.

PUT away your long-unopened Locke on the "Human Understanding," my children. He's out of date. Nobody bothers with human understanding today. Yes, put him away, and read yet another Locke on the Rural Life.

This one was christened William John, and when he isn't holding forth on the joys and beauties of the country, he writes another of the novels which have brought him a comfortable income, a charming Tudor house and a swift and distinctly chic navy blue motor car.

He lives an hour's journey from London. Most of these English literary men hie them to the hillsides as soon as they have run into a satisfactory number of editions. Of course, they don't go so far from the metropolis that they can't be summoned to come and roar as lions at feasts and functions, but they go just far enough to get fresh air and find the "sermons in stones and books in running brooks," mentioned by the poet.

MODERNIST IN ANCIENT SETTING.

The Locke automobile met your Aunt Kate at the little station at Boxmoor, and it puffed her up to Corner Hall, which three hundred and forty years ago belonged to a Tudor knight, and now shelters the successful author of the "Morals of Marcus Ordeyne," the "Beloved Vagabond" and twelve other six-shilling-cum-sixpenny novels.

The front door opened by the magic of a most observant butler who apparently never waits for knocks or rings, but is right on the spot all the time. (Oh, the well oiled clockwork of domestic service here!) Then, from the shadow of a dark and ancient staircase came a tall and very slim gentleman, with hand outstretched in greeting.

It was Mr. Locke, but I couldn't describe him, even to myself, till he led me into a room where the light was less dim than in the hallway.

Anyhow it took my goggles some time to travel up to his face, for there are so many feet of height and so many angles to be surmounted first. But it's nice when you get there. The pale blue, kindly eyes are hidden, in a measure, by glasses. The skin is very fair, and any one of us, my dears, would be charmed and proud to blush as often and as pleasingly as William John does. His hair is—well—I'm afraid it's sandy. I don't like describing it that way, because every blond person just naturally hates being labelled sandy, but that's what it is all the same, and it's so straight that it lies perfectly slick and tight on his cranium, as if gummed down.

He doesn't belong to the dressy type of Englishman. He wore comfortable, loose, dark clothes that hung on him in an easy, ramshackly sort of way, and he hadn't bothered to note whether his socks matched his tie and both blended with the border of his silk handkerchief.

STILL ABLE TO BLUSH.

He blushed as if a female interviewer was a new one on him, as he said sort of shyly, but pleasantly and interestedly:

"What do you think of this part of the country, Miss Carew?"

"It's perfectly charming," I gushed, with my best brand of English accent assumed to put him at ease. Then I lapsed into the vernacular from sheer enthusiasm. "I'm just crazy about these English villages with their cute, little, old houses, their quaint inns and lovely gardens, and Boxmoor is particularly attractive."

He peered out of the window.

"It's a bit misty," he announced, "do you mind a few drops?"

"No, indeed," I answered politely, and as a matter of fact, I am cultivating the amphibious habits of the British.

He gave me no time to change my mind. He was out of the door and in the grounds in two leaps, while I toddled demurely behind him.

It really was a beautiful, old-fashioned, English garden, one of the kind where nature is allowed to get in all her fine work and the gardener is just her understudy and doesn't interfere and cut her up into harbaceous borders, round beds, square beds, stiff Dutch effects and conventional French ones.

LIKES GARDENING—DOESN'T DIG.

It was simply a dear, lovable, fragrant place, where Old World flowers were "a-growin'," where giant trees drooped shading branches over the paths, and high hedges afforded secluded boundaries.

"Are you very fond of gardening?" I asked, after the novelist had shown me his chief floral treasures.

"Yes, indeed, I am," answered Mr. Locke, joyously sniffing a Gloire de Dijon rose. "I can't say I do much of the manual labor myself. I think it wise to leave that to some one who understands it better, but I take the keenest pleasure in planning and designing. Each year I've some new ideas for the garden."

"Oh, I should like the actual digging in the earth myself," said your auntie, who has never had a spade in her hand. "I believe it's good for the soul."

"Well, perhaps it's good for the soul, but it's bad for the garden, unless you know just what you're doing," replied Mr. Locke, prosaically.

Then he made a sudden dive under a clump of bluebells and emerged flushed and triumphant with a small weed which had ventured to make a temporary home there. He was a little short of breath, but he resumed the conversation.

"Yes, it certainly would be good for the soul," he meditated. "It tends toward health—all the fresh air and sunshine, you know—and good health is the window of the soul."

A sort of worried look crept over his face and into his mild blue eyes and he drew back a few paces and looked at the phloxes.

"I don't think that scarlet cluster ought to grow next to the cerise one," he complained, and glanced appealingly at me to see how I felt about it.

A TRIFLE INQUISITIVE.

"I don't agree with you at all," I twittered. "I like a clash of colors out of doors. Too much harmony is depressing."

He wasn't altogether comforted; he shrugged his long, sloping shoulders doubtfully, and he took me down another walk away from the offending shades of red.

"I want you to see this fine old copper beech," he said. "It's over a hundred years old"; and he placed his hand on the trunk affectionately, as if greeting an intimate friend.

"It's a magnificent tree!" I exclaimed; "but they all are. Do tell me if you own this place."

Now, of course, girls, I don't want to pose as the woman with the questioning tongue over here, so I try to curb my curiosity as much as possible; but the only way to find out details about an English man or woman is to probe a little. They never volunteer anything. I'm terribly interested in discovering whether any one besides dukes and lords has a house of his own. You don't seem

"DON'T YOU JUST LOVE TO HEAR A NIGHTINGALE SING?"

"THERE ARE ONLY TWO BASIC PRINCIPLES OF LIFE: LOVE AND HUNGER."

no further.

Then, because he is awfully kind and gentle, really, Mr. Locke seemed sorry he had been a little curt, and he looked down at me quizzically and remarked:

"I know something of your cost of living problem in America. Would you like to know what my yearly rental is?"

I nodded, quite overcome at this most un-English and friendly lack of reticence.

"It's just $800 in your money, with another $150 for rates and taxes, because here the lessee pays these, not the landlord."

Mercy, just imagine it! Nine hundred and fifty dollars for a beautiful hillside of ten acres of lawns and meadows, ancient trees, conservatories for melons, grapes and flowers, a Tudor house, with fourteen bedrooms and all sorts of other rooms, to say nothing of a Jacobean staircase that filled my artistic soul with a great peace!

And I pay—well, never mind what I pay for my flat in a model tenement with a view over the East River!

"I don't mind saying I think you're in great luck," I gurgled.

"Yes," replied William John, with one of his finest blushes, "I think I am."

Then we strolled over and looked at the grapes, which, when they ripen, will be of an embonpoint unsurpassed elsewhere. We plucked gooseberries and tested the plums.

"Everybody ought to live in the country," said Mr. Locke suddenly and dogmatically.

"Perhaps you're right."

"I'm sure I am. I believe people lead healthier, better lives for being on the hills in the sunshine. We used to have a little flat in town and a small country house; then we decided to combine those two into one big place, and we've never been so contented and happy as at present. I always had difficulty working in the city. I can do more and better work here."

"How do you arrange your literary labors? What is your best time?"

"Oh, I try to fit in two hours' writing every morning, but I really accomplish more late at night, when the household is at rest. Would you like to see the animals?"

Cute of him to switch me off like that, wasn't it? I trotted along to see the menagerie, of course, though a large drop of rain had splashed down on my face.

The animals were a bunch of dogs, which jumped all over us and barked friendly greetings in different keys. There was a great Dane, a couple of setters and some Irish terriers; then there were five cats, a pony and a hedgehog, whose coloring matter blended with the earth and hedge roots.

"Got any cows?" I asked the apostle of the rural life.

He looked as guilty as the village storekeeper does when you demand the thing he's just out of for the moment.

"No," he murmured, regretfully, "we haven't; Mrs. Locke draws the line at them."

I feel he misses those cows, but he's much too kind to keep anything which would offend anybody.

Then, gentle and considerate as I'm sure he usually is, he calmly and ruthlessly crushed my very last and dearest illusion. He didn't mean to do it, and maybe if I'd asked the question in a dreamy on-the-heights voice instead of in my matter of fact catechism style he'd have realized he was rambling in the garden with a sentimentalist and would have been indulgent.

I forgave him, of course; but I'd like to say here and now that if your female relative goes on interviewing these famous ones she won't have a shred of romance or illusion left to cheer her old age.

Now the cause of all this perturbation was a simple little query about a nightingale.

Ever since coming to England I've cherished a secret longing to hear that poetry-inspiring birdie go through its vocal stunts. I'd planned that the first time I discovered the whereabouts of a nightingale, I should wait up at my casement window all night, so that my sould could soar into the umpti-umptiness of the infinite along with the magic trilling. Imagine how I felt when I asked blithely:

"Have you any nightingales here?"

And Mr. Locke fairly snapped out:

"Three of them. Pesky creatures!"

Pesky! In the words of Artemus Ward, "It was 2 mutch."

"Please, per-please, don't say you don't like to hear them sing at night," I implored, with great crystal tears in my voice.

Mr. Locke's long arms waved impatiently as he pointed to a nearby tree and growled ferociously:

"Well, if three of them got up there near your bedroom window and started their din, you wouldn't be enthusiastic about it either. You can't sleep. I'd like to shoot every one of them!"

Shades of Shelley!

"Oh, dear me," I jerked out peevishly. "You've gone and done it. You've shattered my last illusion. You've exposed the sawdust in my very best doll!"

He looked contrite, blushed a geranium pink, and said in a "don't cry, little girl, don't cry" tone:

"I suppose nightingales are all right when one's courting on a moonlight night. They're very much in the picture, and all that; but when one gets toward fifty years one wants to sleep."

In the Course of the Give-and-Take Tilt of Questions and Answers the Novelist Deplored City Environment for Children—Love and Hunger the "Only Two Basic Principles of Life."

Surprise made me forget my grief.

"Go on!" I exclaimed. "aren't fifty. You can't be!"

He was rather startled at that expression "Go on!" and I knew myself it wasn't quite the thing, but he wasn't displeased. Who of us doesn't cling to the magic of youth? I've never noticed that a man purrs any the less contentedly than a woman when some one thinks he's younger than he is.

We'd pretty well covered all the acres around the house by this time, and that which the novelist called mist and you and I would designate as rain was falling fairly freely, so we went in and had some tea and more talk.

We sat in carved Jacobean chairs and sipped our tea from delicate old Dresden cups placed on a refectory table, while all around us were beautiful antique pieces of furniture. Here was a great black chest in which the dough for the monastery was kept in a past century. There was a monk's praying chair and there the work table of a Tudor dame.

MRS. LOCKE, OF ARTISTIC EYE.

The walls were lined with books from floor to ceiling, for we were in the study. Just beyond was a beautiful dove gray drawing room with hangings of black woven with silver.

"You have a most satisfying home," I sighed enviously. "Such well thought out color schemes! Even your books are arranged in shades."

He looked like a pleased schoolboy and wound his long legs under his chair. He has some difficulty disposing of these members.

"It's my wife's work," he assured me eagerly. "She has an excellent sense of color."

Then he commenced talking of eugenics and the congress that was held in London, and he made a strong plea for country living as a factor in the lives of the children of the future.

"The environment of the city child is against the natural life," he said earnestly. "It's all deplorably wrong. I feel very strongly in regard to the theories of heredity, but I feel also that environment cures many inherited weaknesses. These two are the makers of character, but environment plays the stronger part in the normal man. You'll notice only that certain people are one character in one environment and another elsewhere. Different phases of their natures are brought out. Each must search for the right environment to satisfy and express his own nature."

ONLY TWO BASIC PRINCIPLES.

"Don't you think these experiments in eugenics will change life, and love and novel writing, and most everything, in time?" I queried somewhat vaguely. I think you have to be vague about eugenic ideas as things are nowadays.

Mr. Locke was quite definite and serious, though. His goggles looked into mine as he expounded solemnly:

"There are only two basic principles of life—love and hunger. One is the instinct to perpetuate the life of the species; the other is the instinct to perpetuate the life of the individual, and no matter how superficial conditions may be modified, these two instincts will be left untouched. The answer to the eternal question is—the man, the woman and the possible baby."

My dramatic instinct took me further.

"What about the other woman?"

Mr. Locke swept her a long way into space with one arm.

"She's just a part of the embroidery of life," he replied, lightly and cheerily.

Hazy sort of classification, wasn't it?

"There'll always be novels," he continued, thoughtfully, "or what literary or dramatic form corresponds to the novel or drama of the future. Yes, the novel will remain as long as these principles exist."

"Isn't taste in novels changing?"

"I don't think so. I believe that is just an invention of the critics."

"What do you think of the English critics?"

Mr. Locke smiled as he said:

CRITICISM THAT TOLD A STORY.

"Just before you came, I was copying a cutting from an old 'Saturday Review.' It is a criticism of one of my first novels. Perhaps it may help to answer your question."

Then he read aloud as follows:

"A novel it cannot be called, since it wholly lacks the novelist's art of construction, and as a study of life and character it is extremely stiff and unsympathetic. But it possesses some interest for the student of human nature, if he views it as an allegory of the life of the woman who wrote it. Here she has poured out her heart, her philosophy of life (an honest philosophy, however mistaken, is always interesting) and the long, hardening struggles of her mind."

I opined after hearing this effusion that he might have a grudge against the critic ilk, but he hastened to add:

"Reviewers on the whole have been exceedingly kind to me, especially American ones."

"What do you think of our novelists?"

"You have some splendid ones and some remarkably fine short story writers. Your magazines are of greatest literary value. We have nothing to compare with them. Pictorially, too, they are very remarkable. And the newspapers! I did enjoy their comic sections tremendously. I was interested, too, in seeing how many others in America also enjoyed them."

ANOTHER DIRECT QUESTION.

I looked at his length and his goggles and his very straight hair, and I asked apropos of nothing:

"Do you mind caricature?"

He looked at me doubtfully.

"Well—er—no, I suppose I don't." Then a hot flush mounted to his cheek. "If only my hair isn't mussed," and he laughed a little nervously and gave its shining sleekness an approving pat.

I'll have to be very careful not to tremble when I draw his locks, because I know he'd never forgive me if the slightest kink crept into the picture.

"Do you ever put real people into your books?" I inquired, as I studied the fourteen works of W. J. Locke in his bookcase.

"No, almost never," he answered. "The one exception is the little girl in the 'Glory of Clementina Wing.' She was drawn from the child of a friend of mine.

"Where do you get the fascinating names of your heroes and heroines?"

"Oh, those I build up myself. I like doing that."

"I believe you like doing everything in the designing and building line," I chirped. "Did you design this house?"

Girls, I got even for the nightingales there. He was hurt.

"It's an old Tudor house," he said patiently.

"Yes, I know," I said, flushing a little myself, "but what I mean is, did you remodel any part of it, or anything like that?"

He brightened.

"Yes, we added a new wing last spring, but I didn't design it."

"Well, you know, you're down in the 'Who's Who' as a sort of high priest in architectural societies," I assured him.

WE RECEIVE A COMPLIMENT.

He smiled and said:

"I'm very much interested in architecture. I think it is the most fascinating of arts, because it combines color and form. Some one has described it as 'frozen music' as well. Since I've been a member of the American Institute of Architecture, I've come into contact with the most famous architects and their work. You know you have some of the finest examples of modern architecture in your country, notably the Pennsylvania station."

Having commended the outside of many of our buildings, he felt he could deliver himself of his opinions as to their internal arrangements, and he forcibly condemned our system of "overheating."

I didn't mind, though. I've heard so much of that since I've been here, and almost every one mentions it with their teeth chattering and the gooseflesh coming out on their necks and arms as they cower over little grate fires which are so insufficient in summer that heaven only knows what they must be in winter.

I think it's awfully heroic, if misguided, of them, so I didn't resent Mr. Locke's remarks. I merely said:

"Do tell me something of the villagers here in your immediate neighborhood. What are they like?"

"Oh, they're the ordinary English laboring class—painstaking, more or less sober and industrious, but hopelessly uninspired. Not an idea in all their united gray matter. You can't do anything for them or drum anything into them. It's no use trying. Makes one conservative in one's views. Universal suffrage for these people. Impossible!"

"You don't believe in it at all?"

"No; I don't. I think some sort of scheme of having one intelligent man vote for a certain number of them, represent them in the voting line as it were, would be feasible, but not individual votes."

PLEADS GUILTY TO PREJUDICE.

"What about woman suffrage?"

"Quite out of the question!"

"Oh, you're prejudiced," I exclaimed.

"Yes, I am," laughed Mr. Locke. "If I haven't got principles, thank Heaven, I have prejudices."

"Well, I do envy you, anyhow," I confessed; "in fact, I'm breaking a commandment every minute. I don't know just which it is, but it deals with coveting a neighbor's possessions."

And, really, I did hate to leave that beautiful, artistic, restful home.

"I DON'T THINK THAT SCARLET PHLOX OUGHT TO GROW NEXT TO THE CERISE ONE," COMPLAINED MR. LOCKE.

Mr. Locke repeated himself like history.

"Well, the country is the place to live," he said cheerfully. "There's nothing like it. We can't imagine how we stayed in the city so long. You take my advice. Buy a little plot of ground in some remote place. Plant things, watch them grow and develop and beautify the place. You'll get so interested and so hale and hearty that you won't know yourself. The rural life is the life. Don't forget that!"

"I won't," I assured him. "I'll consult my editor about it and see if I can't arrange the matter. It sounds awfully attractive."

Since then I've bought dozens of pieces of land and I've built everything from stately residences to thatched cottages upon them, but they've all been of the castle in Spain variety.